Code # 151

NEW JERSEY

2000-2001
Guidelines and
Application

BEST

PRACTICES

The Best Practices application is a public document. The information that you provide will serve as the official record. Review the application prior to submission to ensure accuracy and adherence to the guidelines. Type or keyboard information requested on this page and page 2, if applicable.

Category Language Arts Literacy	(Application is limited to one category. See page 3 for details.)
Practice Name Early Literacy Initiative	
Number of Schools with Practice 3	(If more than one school or district, read and complete information on page 2.)

County	Bergen
District (Proper Name)	Teaneck
Address	
	Street/P. O. Box One Merrison Street
	City Teaneck 07666 Zip Code
Telephone	201-833-5506 Fax 201-833-5495 Email HMorris@Teaneck
Chief School Administrator	Dr. Harold Morris Schools.Org
Nominated School #1 (Proper Name)	Hawthorne School
Address	201 Fycke Lane
	Street/P. O. Box
	City Teaneck 07666 Zip Code
Telephone	201 833-5540 Fax 201 862-2350 Email APerasso@Teaneck
Principal	Albert Perasso Schools.Org
Program Developer(s)	Albert Perasso, Barbara Pinsak, Elise Bourne-Busby
Application Prepared By	Evelyn Wolff
Chief School Administrator's or Charter School Lead Person's Signature	*[signature]*

FOR USE BY COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS ONLY

Approved: ✓ Yes ___ No   County Superintendent's Signature _*[signature]*_

NEW JERSEY STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NEW JERSEY
BEST PRACTICES
2000-2001 APPLICATION

Application Requirements: <u>Failure to comply with the procedures for submission of the application will result in the elimination of the application.</u>

1. **RESPONSES to the information and the statements below must be ANONYMOUS and ACCURATE.** No reference should be made to the names of the district, the school(s) or community. Use the words "the school" or "the schools" in referring to the applicant in responding to the statements

2. **USE ONLY THE SPACE PROVIDED ON THE APPLICATION FORM on pages 1, 2 (if applicable), and 4.** Do <u>not</u> include any additional materials, as they will not be reviewed in the selection process.

3. Application must be **keyboarded on 8 ½" x 11" white paper, portrait** format. **Twelve-point or larger computer font or fourteen-pitch or larger typewritten font** must be used. (This sentence is in twelve-point Times New Roman.)

4. **KEYBOARDED RESPONSES** to all the statements below must be **no more than a total of four pages. Keyboard and number the statement followed by the response.** Format your response for accuracy and clarity.

5. **The information on page 4 and the responses** to statements must be copied **on one side of the page. The information on pages 1 and 2 (if applicable)** must be copied **on one side of the page.** Staple pages 1, 2 (if applicable), 4, and the keyboarded responses together, in that same order.

6. **The original application must be signed by the district chief school administrator or charter school lead person, indicating his/her approval.**

7. **The original and seven copies of the application** must be submitted to the county superintendent of schools by **November 27, 2000,** with the **Itemized List of District Applications** form. Keep the seven copies of each application together with the original containing the signature of the district chief school administrator or charter school lead person on the top of each set.

The following data is required to assist the panelists in the evaluation of the application:

Type of School

X Elementary School
___ Middle School
___ Junior High School
___ High School
___ Other: _____

Grade Levels

1-4

Practice Name Early Literacy Initiative

Number of Schools with Practice   3
Number of Districts with Practice   1
Location ___ Urban/City x Suburban With Urban Charcteristics
___ Suburban ___ Small City/Town ___ Rural

Check the ONE CATEGORY into which the practice best fits.

___ Arts (Visual and Performing Arts)
___ Assessment/Evaluation
___ Bilingual Education and Diversity
___ Citizenship/Character Education
___ Early Childhood Education Programs
___ Educational Support/Guidance and Counseling Programs

___ Educational Technology
___ Gifted and Talented Programs
___ Health and Physical Education
X Language Arts Literacy
___ Mathematics
___ Professional Development
___ Public Engagement
(family involvement and partnerships with business, community, school districts, and/or higher education)

___ Safe Learning Environment
___ School-to-Careers/Workplace Readiness
___ Science
___ Social Studies
___ Special Education
___ World Languages

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1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative and how it promotes high student achievement.

2. List the specific *Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards,** addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses those standard(s). Provide an example to substantiate your response.

3. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. Provide assessments and data to show how the practice met these needs.

4. Describe how you would replicate the practice in another school and/or district.

*The 1996 edition of the *Core Curriculum Content Standards* published by the New Jersey State Department of Education was disseminated to all districts and charter schools and is available on line through the department's web site at http://www.state.nj.us/education.

1) Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative and how it promotes high student achievement.

The goal of the Early Literacy Initiative is to enable every student to read at or above grade level and thus narrow the achievement gap between white and non-white students. The philosophy that embraces the program is that through a highly diagnostic and individualized approach, all children can and will learn strategies to become independent readers and writers. In order to do this, the environment of the classroom must be devoted to literacy, i.e., all activities, regardless of content area, are literacy activities.

It was evident from assessment data and anecdotal evidence that many of the primary grade children, particularly in grade 1, were reading below grade level. In the 1998-99 school year, 27% of the first grade class was considered below level in reading. This pattern existed over a period of years and was even more pronounced for children of color. However, dedicated and experienced teachers found themselves without the necessary tools to improve the situation and, by second grade, teachers in the basic skills program found themselves inundated with students reading below grade level. Clearly, change was necessary, and it was decided to target first grade as a key grade to establish a foundation in literacy.

On the assumption that, despite varying backgrounds and experiences, all children can learn to read, the focus was to revamp the curriculum and its delivery. A first grade reading program was designed and implemented in the 1999-2000 school year by a literacy specialist, based on a systemic approach to change. Research indicated that in order to effect change the following had to occur concurrently: reduction in class size, ongoing staff development, skilled implementation of a variety of validated instructional approaches, ongoing data collection and analysis, support for program goals by all stakeholders, and provision of an infusion of materials to support the program. (In order to finance the Early Literacy Program, the district postponed purchases for other programs.)

What is innovative about the program, and is necessary for its replication, is the recognition that all the program components described above required simultaneous implementation and that ongoing supervision, data collection and analysis were key to the success of the program.

The objective was that 95% of first grade students exit first grade reading on level or above, as determined by having attained the following benchmarks on literacy measures, considered to be crucial for literacy development:
1) *Letter Identification Task*: Identify 54 upper and lower case letters ("a" and "g" represented in two lowercase fonts)
2) *Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words*: Represent 37 phonemes (discrete sounds) through written text
3) *High Frequency Word Test*: Read 20 high frequency words out of context
4) *Writing Vocabulary Spree*: Compose 40 words or more (spelled correctly) from visual memory in a ten-minute time period
5) *Text Level Reading*: Read leveled text with at least 90 % accuracy to determine a grade level reading score (ranging from emergent reading [beginning kindergarten] through grade 5). (Marie Clay, *An Observation Survey, 1993*.)

<u>The Program</u>

Class Size
As the research demonstrates, and the federal government has recognized, class size impacts achievement for all students. That impact is sustained even in larger class size settings, and, in particular, improves achievement among minority students. In order for the program to be effective, class size was reduced from 21-22, to 16-17. That was the framework that enabled changes to unfold in curriculum, instructional strategies, and staff development.

Staff Development
There are three grade 1-4 schools in the district, 17 first grade teachers and one Reading Recovery teacher per school. To maximize commitment to the program, teachers attended a program presentation and completed an application to participate in the program.

The program was designed and implemented under the supervision of the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, who has extensive experience and expertise in the area of literacy. During the summer 1999 all first grade classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers, as well as elementary principals, were trained in the philosophy and implementation of the reading program. This included classroom set-up and design, strategies, planning for instruction, assessment as an instructional process, and instructional alignment with frameworks and the New Jersey Core Content Standards. Staff development continued throughout the year, through the venues of grade level meetings, building-based group meetings and individual observation and consultation. In addition to the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Reading Recovery teachers served as staff developers for teachers in their buildings by teaching and re-enforcing strategies.

Staff development took other forms as well. For example, the Director wrote and distributed a monthly newsletter for primary teachers, entitled "Primary Concerns," in which she made suggestions for auxiliary activities, books, poems, or literature; provided tips on the use of strategies; or reviewed relevant research. Also, teachers found instructional videos very effective in demonstrating the use of strategies.

Parental involvement included informational parent meetings, adoption of the program's objectives as a goal for one school's Building Quality Management Team, supportive activities such as listening to their children read books that were sent home, and participation as "Reading Buddies," to provide additional opportunities for children to read to someone else. In one school, workshops were provided for parents whose children were not achieving the benchmarks, to suggest activities to support their child's literacy development. In another school an "Author's Night" was attended by parents in which they listened to and viewed the year's writings of the children in the class.

2) List the specific Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards, addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses those standard(s). Provide an example to substantiate your response.

The Core Curriculum Content Standards addressed by the initiative are:
Cross Content Workplace Readiness Standards:
3. All students will use critical thinking, decision-making and problem-solving skills

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4. All students will use self-management skills
Language Arts Literacy Standards
1. All students will speak for a variety of real purposes and audiences.
2. All students will listen actively in a variety of situations from a variety of sources.
3. All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.
4. All students will read various materials and texts with comprehension and critical analysis.

The first grade program addressed the above standards by providing the foundation of literacy skills. The process of learning to decode and comprehend written and spoken language involves the ongoing utilization of critical thinking, decision-making and problem-solving skills to enable children to read and write independently. Speaking practices such as shared reading, author sharing, "Show and Tell," reader's theater and puppetry retells allow students to develop confidence speaking in front of a group (Language Arts Standard # 1). Listening strategies such as partner reading, audio recorded student books, trade books in the listening center, literature response groups and "read-to's" daily provide a variety of listening experiences from varied sources (Language Arts Standard # 2). Writing methodologies such as Interactive Writing, Modeled Writing, Guided Writing and Shared Writing are all highly strategic approaches that lead to independent writing (Language Arts Standard #3). Similarly, reading methodologies such as Guided Reading, Shared Reading, Literature Circles, and Word Study (Language Arts Standard #4) lead to independent reading. Practices such as providing individual student book boxes support individual reading needs. To insure the success of this initiative the district provided an infusion of literacy materials for all first grade classrooms.

3) The practice has documented assessment measures for meeting its objectives and student education needs.

Staff were trained in literacy assessments cited above. The reliability and validity of these measurement instruments were based on the following attributes: all students are assessed on a common task; there is a standard method of administering each task; there are ways of knowing when observations and comparisons are reliable, and each task is "authentic" in that it is similar to a real world task. The multiplicity of measures ensures a more accurate picture of each child's strengths and needs, while the use of stanines allows analysis of trends across various measures.

A key component to the success of the initiative is that assessment is ongoing, enabling teachers to better focus individual instruction, as well as inform the stakeholders as to progress of the children. To that end, data were collected through teacher observations three times during the year: (See table below). Student progress was analyzed to determine achievement of benchmarks in the key areas of literacy. Children's levels of achievement were compared by looking at percentages distributed by stanine levels.

Achievement of Benchmarks (Percent): October 1999, February 2000, June 2000

	Letter ID	Hear & Record Sounds	High Frequency Words	Writing Vocabulary	Text Level Reading
October 1999	17	9	12	2	12
February 2000	74	31	40	38	42
June 2000	99	96	92	97	89

Key findings from the mid-year assessment informed subsequent teaching, e.g., if students lacked strong letter identification or knowledge of phonemes, they were unable to progress in any of the remaining measures. The Project Director used the data to focus her observations to identified students and recommend practices for teachers to use for students reading below a specified level.

Final results: Using the five benchmarks identified above, first grade students achieved the following: 95% of the children met the established benchmarks, when all the measurements were averaged. When the five tasks were analyzed independently, students' knowledge of high frequency words out of context and their ability to read and comprehend end-of-grade text were below the benchmark (92% and 89%, respectively), while they exceeded the benchmarks on the remaining three measures. Although scores were not disaggregated by race, since children of color constitute 75% of the first grade population, the gap between them and white children was narrowed. Overall, the 1999-2000 first grade cohort was a success and far exceeded the accomplishments of the previous cohorts.

Recommendations for the subsequent school year included extending the program to kindergarten and second grade, while expanding and re-enforcing the repertoire of strategies for first grade teachers. The children will continue to be monitored and, as teachers routinely use data to inform teaching, it will become standard practice.

4) Describe how you would replicate the practice in another school and/or district.

In order to replicate the practice, the district must commit to providing the necessary materials, training and ongoing supervision. Staff must be committed to the program and parents need to be informed. The key aspects of the program must be implemented on an ongoing basis. Staff development, technical assistance, data collection and analysis, and the use of data to inform teaching, are all continuous processes that must be present to ensure the success of the program.